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Fifty low income, rural families living in Dane County, Wisconsin, having school-age children, were studied to obtain information that would be useful for community development work with families in rural areas, and to assess the delivery of social services in rural areas. Characteristics of the poor in Wisconsin and in the United States as a whole are examined. The results from interviews conducted for this study are reported. The rural poor, educational background, employment patterns, use of social services, and participation in social activities are topics discussed. It was found that poverty was a way of life for these rural families. It was also revealed that major obstacles to the rural family's involvement in community development projects exist. These obstacles are discussed. Augmented direct social services are recommended, and also some structural change in the present pattern of income distribution. (SW)

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LOCKED IN POVERTY

The Rural Poor Family In Dane County

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School of Social Work
University of Wisconsin
Madison

1968

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LOCKED IN POVERTY

The LOW INCOME RURAL FAMILY IN DANE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

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Preface

This study of 50 low income, rural families was made to obtain information that would be useful for community development work with such families, and to assess the delivery of social services in rural areas. It turned into a reconnaisance of a little known battle-ground of the war on poverty.

The report is one of several on social problems in the Madison metropolitan area.* They provide some of the base line data needed to understand welfare related problems in the local community.

Support for this study was provided by University Extension's Center for Community Leadership Development because of its interest in finding ways to reach and involve low income people in community action. The Center's support is very much appreciated. Thanks also are due to the families who were willing to be interviewed, and to the clergy, township officials, social agency representatives and others who aided the study.

Planning, interviewing and data analysis were done by students of the School of Social Work as part of their education in social research. All have since graduated. Linda K. Dressel, Gerald L. Hanson, Darlene A. Henselin, Edward J. Konkil, Jr., Mary B. Sobota and Freida M. Thomas worked hard on this reconnaisance of poverty in Dane County. Mr. George Thomas was a consultant to the study. This and his other work on poverty has been most helpful. Mr. Robert Segelman also made valuable suggestions for the interpretation of data.

Charles O'Reilly
Professor

Madison, Wisconsin
December 1967

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*"Facts About Poverty in Madison," (1965); "The Attitudes of Parents in the Williamson Street Neighborhood," (1967); "The Negro in South Madison." (1967)

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I. THE RURAL POOR

An affluent, primarily urban society tends to overlook the problem of poverty in its rural areas. Yet nationwide, 4.4 million of the 9.7 million families with net cash incomes under $3,000 in 1959 were rural families. (4) One one-third of the rural poor families were on farms; two-thirds were rural, non-farm residents.* The rural families, who comprised 29% of the total population, made up a disproportionately large 46% of the nation's poor families. In comparison, although 71% of all U.S. families were urban, they made up only 56% of all poor families. In Wisconsin and many other states the rural poor are whites, contrary to the impression held by many that America's rural poor are mostly Southern Negroes.

In the nation, 7.7% of all urban white families lived in destitution in 1960, i.e., had incomes under $2,000 a year. The same was true of 15.7% of the rural white non-farm families and 28.6% of the rural white farm families. (14) Wisconsin was a little better off with 6.4% of all its families in destitution compared to 13.4% of its rural families and 22.4% of its farm families. This situation has not changed materially since 1960 and the poor family remains a problem for the nation and the state. (12)

This report tells something about 50 low income, white families who live in rural Dane County in south central Wisconsin, Interviews with them during the summer and fall of 1966 focused upon the needs of low income people, their use of social services and potential for involvement in economic opportunity (anti-poverty) programs.**

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*according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, places with less than 2,500 population are rural. That is the only meaning of rural in this report. (16)

**For convenience the interviewees are occasionally referred to as a "sample", but they were not intended as, nor should they be considered a sample in the technical sense of that word. On the other hand, they probably are as representative a group of low income families as could be obtained for a pilot study of rural poverty in this area.

Although a lot has been written about poverty in the last few years, research on the rural poor is scarce. Some of what is known about urban poverty is applicable to the poor anywhere but certain unique characteristics of rural poverty require research specifically addressed to it. Writers about poverty tend to allude to the rural poor in passing usually doing little more than citing statistics about them. (3,4,7) Few examine the living conditions of the rural poor as Johnson did in a study of Kentucky mountain families. (6)

Some writers about rural poverty stress the plight of the small farmer who cannot keep pace or of the migrant farm worker. Their problems are important, of course, but the rural poor are increasingly non-farm. After reviewing the literature on rural poverty one can only agree with Fuller's conclusion that, while quite a bit is known about low income farming, much less is known about low income, non-farm people. (4)

While research on rural poverty is limited, that dealing with social services for the rural poor is even more limited. A recent survey of rural sociological studies made between 1936 and 1965 found that slightly more than one percent touched on social welfare. (13)

Efforts to remove low income families from the shadow of dependency rest in part upon the acquisition of more knowledge about them and their problems. We are unsure, for example, about the extent to which existing social services meet their needs, nor do we know how to obtain their "maximum feasible participation" in economic opportunity self-help programs. Until we know more about such things many programs designed to help the poor will be shots in the dark.

Our sketchy knowledge about the rural poor is understandable given the paucity of empirical material about any of the poor until quite recently. The urban scene has captured public attention partly because of the civil rights crisis and also because of the muddle in urban development. These and such things as the epic mythology of rural America have deflected attention from the rural proletariat.

The changed character of the rural resident has significantly altered the problems of rural areas. Today rural people are no longer predominantly farmers. Only one-fourth of all rural families are farm residents and the 1960 census revealed that only one-fifth of the rural labor force engaged in agriculture. Blue collar workers have replaced farmers as the largest rural occupational group. (2)

Dane County reflects these national changes. Between 1950 and 1960 it had an 18.6% drop in its rural farm population while its rural non-farm population increased by 12.9%. Those engaged in agriculture between 1950 and 1960 decreased from 12.8% to 7.4% of the rural population. (8) The rural families we studied reflect this shift from farming to blue collar employment. Seventy percent of our employed heads of households were employed in a city, town, or village, usually in blue collar jobs, and only 16% worked in farming and directly related occupations. Thus, this study does not talk about farmers but about people living in a rural area who are closely tied to the city for jobs and services and subject to all its pervasive influences.

The Rural Poor in Dane County

Dane County's low income families are among Harrington's "invisible poor." (5) They are not concentrated in pockets of poverty like the poor in Appalachia and some other parts of the country. Dispersal reduces their salience, makes communication between them difficult and creates problems for programs that attempt to involve them in community action to combat poverty.

Many local people find it hard to believe that Dane County, the second most populous county in the state, has enough "poor" people to constitute a problem. It ranked fifth in the state in family income in 1960 and sixty-sixth among the states seventy-two counties in percentage of families with incomes under $3,000, and twelfth in rural family income. At $6,614 per household, the county's median income was well above the state and national median, largely because of the incomes of Madison residents. With about 165,000 residents, Madison is the second largest city, the state capitol, and the site of the oldest campus of the University of Wisconsin. (11) The city is heavily white collar. In 1960, half of its experienced male labor force was white collar, compared to 30% in the state and 34% in the Milwaukee area. (15)

The 1960 median income of all the county's rural residents was $5,463 and that of rural farm units was $4,450 compared to statewide medians of $5,169 for rural non-farm and $3,821 for rural farm families. The county had relatively fewer households with incomes under $7,000 than the state as a whole. However, 2,739 or about one-fifth of its 13,004 rural families had incomes under $3,000. Of the 12.9% of the county's families with poverty level incomes, three out of ten lived outside of Madison and comprised 8.8% of all non-Madison families. Few of these people were farm residents. Some were rural non-farm and others were residents of smaller "urban" places.

Not all low income families in Dane County live in grinding poverty any more than all low income families elsewhere in the country. But their economic marginality leaves them at the mercy of such things as seasonal employment, illness and other emergencies that are less likely to provoke a major crisis in the lives of most American families.

The problems of these low income families are not solely financial. We found they experience a wide range of personal and family problems that are intensified by the stresses accompanying low incomes. Some manage these stresses quite well and could leave everything associated with poverty behind tomorrow, if they had enough money. Others are enmeshed in poverty and everything associated with it. In the latter cases, however, even modest income increments could help them live a very different life.

The Meaning of A Low Income

Efforts to define terms like "poverty" or "low income" are understandably influenced by the values of those who do the defining. For convenience the federal government began its economic opportunity program with an arbitrary definition of the poverty line as an annual income of $3,000 for a family of four. Obviously it begged the question of where a family with $3,001 could enjoy non-poverty status, but a beginning had to be made. This study used the federal definition in lieu of anything better.

"Low income" is a very general term covering all kinds of economic marginality. The meaning of a low income depends upon age, race, family size, how much purchasing power one has, where one lives, what neighbors have and many other factors.

The dollar value of an adequate income and the goods and services it represents, shifts from time to time and place to place. A low income in Dane County might seem like affluence to a sharecropper in Alabama but what is relevant for each place is not what is found elsewhere, but what is needed here and now. That is why it is virtually meaningless to compare the lot of today's poor with that of the poor of yesteryear, or of today's poor in Latin America. People, and society, judge poverty by what the neighbor's have.

Although "poor" and "low income" are often equated, the latter is a more general term that includes all kinds of economic disadvantage. Old books on poverty often made distinctions between "poverty" and "destitution" or between the "poor" and "paupers". In most cases this was an academic exercise and the terms rarely kept their assigned meaning. The same tends to be true of "poverty" and "low income".

There is some point to such distinctions, however, as Myrdal showed in assigning the term "destitution" to families with incomes well below the federal poverty line. He considered families with incomes under $4,000 in poverty and those with less than $2,000 in destitution. (10) Some might call this "abject poverty", or "impoverishment". In contemporary America $4,000 is better than $2,000 as a family income, but objectively the former is a low income. Any family with less than it needs to maintain decency has a low income in relation to other families. While there are advantages to using the term low income to describe families just above the poverty line, it tends to be a generic term that includes the "poor", "destitute", and "impoverished". Those interviewed for this study ranged from the impoverished or very poor, to people slightly above the technical poverty line, but nonetheless poor by any objective criteria.

Who Was Interviewed

The study was interested in the meaning of a low income for families living outside of urban places and who the community defined as low income families. The identification of these families was approached primarily from the perspective of the community. A more convenient way of defining people as poor because they sought categorical or general assistance was avoided. We did use eighteen families receiving surplus commodities but major reliance was placed upon finding people who local welfare officials, health workers, clergymen and others knew to have low incomes.

There is, of course, no assurance that merely because a family is defined as low income by neighbors or anyone else that it is indeed low income, or that only families so defined are in fact poor. The community's identification may be incorrect and may fail to cover all such families. Although it would have been useful to ennumerate all low income families in the county, lack of time and resources precluded this. Using informants proved practical and reliable, thus enabling us to gain access to people meeting the community's criteria of low income status. (17)

Informants produced the names of 225 low income families and 140 individuals. We were most interested in the 115 families with children of school age. If we assume that the families with children averaged five children each, as did the families in the sample, then about 1150 persons in low income families were located through this process. They did not include, of course, the aged or disabled poor and their dependents.

Contacts were made with about sixty of the families with school age children. Due to some refusals and incomplete interviews, we were left with fifty complete interviews. Twenty were with men and thirty were with women. These interviews provided the material for this report.

What value is there in studying a small group of low income rural people?* The dearth of available information about them places a scarcity value on such studies. The more we learn about the poor the more evident it becomes that they are a diverse group with widely differing needs and potentials. We need much more specific information about them. Without it, it will not be possible to provide the tailor made programs needed to remove their disabilities.

Studies such as this one provide some of the pieces needed to understand the puzzle of poverty in our time. As patterns emerge programs can be based upon hard facts, and not upon the myth of the economic man, the stalwart farmer or the culture of poverty or any other convenient myth in keeping with one's ideological orientation and the political needs of the moment.

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*the small size of the "sample" needs no apology but requires some explanation. That of Meyers and Roberts is applicable: "Although we sacrificed the size of our sample to study our cases in greater depth, the fifty patients in our study constitute considerably more cases than found in many investigations in the field." (9)

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16. *For a discussion of the problem of defining the word "rural" see: Willits, Fern K., and Bealer, Robert, C., "An Evaluation of a Composite Definition of Rurality." Rural Sociology, 32, 1967, 165-177.

17. More exactly, families meeting the low income criteria of presumably knowledgeable members of the community. No opinion poll was taken on the subject nor would one be desirable. A panel could identify low income families in small towns or rural areas in which neighbors know each other's resources fairly well. Although not infallible, a panel could identify the poor as well as similar panels nominate community leaders and influentials.

    Note that all families in the sample were white. This is because so few nonwhites live in rural Dane County. According to the 1960 census, only ninety-one non-whites lived in the county outside of Madison.

II. THE LOW INCOME FAMILY AND EDUCATION

The role a limited education plays in the perpetuation of poverty has been documented extensively. A Department of Agriculture study, for example, suggests that the higher incidence of rural poverty follows from the lower educational level of rural residents, which limits them to lower paying jobs. (1) Butterworth and Dawson claim that all solutions to the problems of the disadvantaged rest upon equally available educational opportunities. (3) Education certainly is not the only remedy for the ills of poverty, but Miller points out that every study of the relation between earnings and education shows that the more highly educated the man, the greater his earnings. (13)

Keyserling is another who drew attention to the high correlation between the amount of education and poverty. In 1963, about 44% of the more than seven million families whose heads had less than eight years of education lived in poverty compared to under 5% of the 5.3 million families whose heads had four or more years of college. (9) How far many of the poor and culturally disadvantaged are from an education that can be translated into an adequate income is made clear by the work of Lewis, (11) Riesman, (15) Harrington, (6) Clark, (4) and many others.

Rural residents now receive more education than their parents or grandparents, but a discrepancy still exists between their education and that of urban residents. In 1959, the median education of those over twenty-five years of age in rural counties was 9.2 years compared to 10.6 years for urban counties with cities from 25,000 to 50,000 population. (8) In Wisconsin the median education of rural dwellers over twenty-five was 8.9 years, slightly below the national figure. (16)

The median education of those over twenty-five in the sample was ten years, which was above both state and national medians. However, compared with the median education of those over twenty-five in Dane County and in Madison, with whom they must compete for jobs, the result was not very favorable for them. Outside of Madison the median education was 12.1 years and for the city of Madison itself it was 12.5 years. (16)

Those interviewed were at an educational disadvantage if for no other reason than the fact thay they live in a county with a high educational level. While 59.6% of those over twenty-five in the county had completed at least four years of high school, only 34% of the family heads in the sample completed that much schooling.

Because family heads had less education than their urban counterparts, they probably have difficulty competing with them for jobs. Of the thirty-seven employed family heads in the sample, two-thirds worked in urban areas within the county. They averaged 10.4 years of education, compared with an average 9.3 years for family heads employed in rural areas. The two groups differed by one year's education and this may have some bearing on their jobs.

Twenty five of the fifty family heads were interested in further vocational training. The rest would not be interested for several reasons, mostly due to satisfaction with current jobs, or physical disability. Desire for vocational training was unrelated to level of education. Age played some role, however. Family heads interested in further training had an average age of thirty six compared to 41.7 for those not interested in further training.

Women in rural areas tend to stay in school longer than men. In 1960, men over twenty five in Wisconsin's rural areas had 8.8 years of schooling, compared with 9.6 years for rural women over twenty five. (16) In the sample, the median years of education completed by men over twenty five was ten years while for women it was twelve years. In the forty-four intact families studied half of the wives had at least one more year of school than their husbands.

The average age of family heads in the sample was 41.8 years and their mean education was about ten years. Older family heads had the least amount of education. Doerflinger and Marshall found a similar relationship between age and education in their study of Price County, Wisconsin. (5) That study was not limited to a lower socio-economic group, but Price County is considered a problem area because of its low average income and high unemployment.

Education and Income

In 1964, Innes and others conducted a national survey to determine the economic returns of education, and concluded that for men at all age levels, income increased as years of schooling increased. (8) Our families have less formal education than the average Dane County citizen. However, there was little variation between the average years of education completed by family heads with different income levels. Those with incomes between one and two thousand dollars a year had a median of nine years of education, and those with five thousand had a median of 10.1 years.

In the forty-four families headed by couples, one-fourth of the wives worked, nine full time. The median education of men whose wives worked at least part time was eight years while their wives had a median of twelve years of education. Six of the wives who worked had completed more than twelve years of education. The finding that all five of the wives who had completed high school had jobs is similar to that of Brunner and Wayland, who claimed that the better educated married woman is more likely to be employed outside the home. (2) Of the nine two parent families in which the wife was working full time, seven had family incomes of five thousand dollars. Without the wives' wages these families would have been more severely disadvantaged financially.

Thirteen families were multi-problem, i.e., they were receiving service from more than one social service agency.* The educational level of these family heads differed only slightly from other heads of families.

Education and Unemployment

Brunner and Wayland found that the lower a person's level of education, the more likely he was to be unemployed.(2) In the sample, the five unemployed family heads had a median education of eight years. None had completed high school and their average age was 52.8 years, compared with the average age of 41.8 years for all family heads in the sample. The unemployed were the older, less educated family heads in the sample.

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*for our purpose multiproblem meant known concurrently to more than one social agency.

Parental Expectations

Information about the children in the sample was obtained during visits to several schools. It was not possible to visit all the schools in which the 202 school age children were enrolled, but data was obtained for 120 of them. Visits were made to five grade schools attended by sixty-five children, to three junior high schools with fourteen children, and to four high schools enrolling the remaining forty-one students. Information was gathered about academic achievement, attendance records, extracurricular activities, and vocational plans. An effort also was made to discover how each child was perceived by school staff. After receiving assurances about the confidentiality of the information sought, school personnel were most cooperative.

Parents in the sample were well aware that education is important for their children. Of fifty-one children between the ages of fourteen and seventeen, only three had dropped out of school by the beginning of the 1966-1967 school year. The rest were still in school despite the fact that their parents had considerably less education than the average person in Dane County. In 1960, 92.3% of the county's children between fourteen and seventeen were enrolled in school, so this age group in the sample had no more dropouts than their peers.

Table 1: Family Expectations for Education.

Expected Education	Daughters	Sons
High School Diploma	46.7	36.4
High School Diploma and Vocational Training	13.3	26.9
Some College	22.2	11.5
College Degree	17.8	20.6
Graduate or Professional School		4.6
TOTALS	100.0	100.0

Questions about parental educational expectations for their sons and their daughters were answered by forty-one persons. In ten families expectations were higher for boys than for girls, while in seven families expectations for daughters exceeded those for the sons. The remainig twenty-four had equal hopes for both. Manning's study of rural, lower socio-economic status children in Florida 1959, showed that most parents in his sample felt that boys needed more education than girls, and that the minimum amount of education which a child should have was the completion of high school. (12) The present group also believed that at least a high school education was imperative. In a study of four rural farm communities in Minnesota, Nelson found that from 43% to 94% of the participants favored boys getting more than an eighth grade education. (14) Obviously more than rural residence affects attitudes toward education.

Vocational plans for each of the forty-one high school students were examined through the use of the child's school record, and in an interview with his guidance counselor. The forty-one children came from seventeen families. Only one family seemed to have unrealistic expectations for its children. In the other families, parents who expected a child to go to college, had the child enrolled in a college preparatory course. This was the case with thirteen pupils from eight families, eleven of whom had definite college plans. The remaining twenty-eight high school students were enrolled in general courses.

The relationship between the parents' expectation and the child's actual plans was close. For example, the school felt the boys in one family were poor students and could not go beyond high school, but that the daughters were very intelligent and could go to college. The parents told the interviewer that they expected that their sons would finish high school and the daughters would attend college. The local schools encouraged lower income children identified as capable, to move into higher education. The guidance programs in the four school systems visited were well developed and close contact was maintained with students and their families.

Cooperation with the School

The 120 children in the schools that could be visited came from twenty-four families. Only two families were considered difficult to work with by the school staff. Three other families were characterized as disinterested in their children's education and failed to motivate them to do well in school.

The other nineteen families were concerned about education and cooperated with the school whenever they could. Although few were active in parent-teacher groups, most attended school conferences and many participated in school activities.

Attitudes Toward Education

Eight out of every ten respondents felt that a child growing up in rural Dane County needed the same amount of education as the child in an urban area. This seems to indicate that families in the sample realized the importance of education.

The children varied widely in all areas from academic achievement to participation in extra-curricular activities. One fourth of the students were rated above average by their teachers, a third were considered average students and 40% were achieving below average. About half of the below-average students were considered capable of doing at least average work. Twenty-five of the below average students came from five families, while the rest were scattered throughout the group. Three of the five families had a total of fourteen children, none of whom had tested I.Q.'s above 100. In one family, the school attributed the children's learning difficulties to frequent school changes due to moves by the family. In another, the school felt that emotional problems not directly related to the family's financial situation, prevented the children from achieving academically. Three of the five families were identified as multi-problem families.

Children's Problems

Only five children had reading problems. Four students excelled in artistic areas, and many others were extremely well accepted by their peers. Only four of the children were considered isolates, but ten children were in a social circle made up of children of their "own kind".

Two thirds of the twenty-four families were identified as low income by the school staff. The financial situation of these families had not come to the attention of school officials because of academic failure, but because of a lack of clothing, poor health, poor grooming, or inability to pay for school lunches.

In half of the twenty-four families, the school had noticed a wide variety of problems. In eight families the problems revolved around lack of money for such necessities as clothing and good nutrition. In three families, the school felt that poor planning and housekeeping standards were greater problems than lack of money. Poor school attendence, defined as ten or more days of unexcused absence per year, was a problem in three families. In one family, the children were allowed to stay home for any reason. In another, the boys stayed home to do farm work at frequent intervals. The seven children in the third family stayed home to care for their pre-school brothers and sisters while their parents worked. These children took turns missing school, and the school arranged to overlook the absences because teachers realized that they did not truant on purpose. Fortunately, all of these children are of above average ability and able to do average or better work, even though they miss much school. In three other families, the children suffer from emotional problems. The schools are aware of the problems of these children and they had positive attitudes toward them. Some evidence of this comes from the fact that none of the 120 children were considered a discipline problem by their school.

Mental Retardation

A high rate of mental retardation was found among the children. Kirk has estimated that the prevalence of totally dependent or trainable children does not differ between the low, middle, and high socio-economic communities.(10) However, he claims the rate of educable and slow learning pupils is almost two times greater in the lower class than in the middle class. His estimates are based upon surveys done in the United States and England. The rate of educable mental retardation may be as high as fifty per one thousand school-age children in low socio-economic areas and that of slow learners as high as 300 per 1000 school-age children. In middle class areas the rates are 25 per 1000 and 170 per 1000 respectively.

Of the 202 school-age children in the sample, fifteen were in classes for the educable retarded, a rate of seventy-four per one thousand school-age children. In Dane County, excluding the city of Madison, 415 students were enrolled in special classes out of a total school enrollment of 28,041; a rate of fifteen per one thousand school-age children. (19) Thus the rate in the sample was five times that in the county. The retarded in the sample came from eleven families, with four of them having more than one child in special classes.

Summary

Rural low income families in Dane County are at an educational disadvantage in the labor market. Although six out of ten adults over twenty-five years old in the county completed high school, only one-third of the family heads interviewed had that much education. The fact that half of the family heads expressed interest in vocational training is hopeful. These people tended to be younger than those not interested in such training but did not differ from them educationally.

Parents wanted their children to finish school and evidently encouraged them to do so, since only three out of fifty-one high school age children were drop outs. Some children had learning problems or emotional problems but most were rated as average or above average students.

Schools had noticed problems in half of the families, usually associated with their low incomes. One serious problem was the high incidence of mental retardation. Whether this is directly related to poverty could not be determined but obviously it is a serious problem for this group of low income families.

Although Weiner and Murray (17) found that lower class children were not preparing for college, probably because of lack of encouragement by the parents and the school, this was not the case in Dane County. Parents expected 40% of the boys and 36% of the girls to attend college and their hopes jibed with the school's assessment of the child's potential for more education. This does not mean that all children who are not college bound lacked the potential for more education. What evidence we have, however, suggests that most children did get encouragement from the school. Only time will tell whether this can compensate for the barren environment in which they live and help them get an education that gives them access to the mainstream of society.

Like other low-income people everywhere in the country, those in Dane County are poorly prepared to compete for jobs because of inadequate education. Quite a few would like to remedy this by getting vocational training. Although their motivation was not measured, their answers suggest the possibility of upgrading some of them. Their age, family responsibilities and distance from training facilities would complicate plans for training, but some of these obstacles could be overcome with sufficient ingenuity and money. Providing incentives for attending a distant vocational school might be one approach, for example, for the one boy in four whose family expected him to obtain vocational training. Scholarships to foster such training in the local area might induce some to get a more adequate vocational preparation.

The low income parent realized the value of education and probably would support programs that provided a chance for them to break out of poverty. The attitude represented by the very low drop out rate among high schoolers could be exploited by programs consciously aimed at the low income child.

These low income families are not in a culture of poverty. They are adjacent to the mainstream although they are dubious about their ability to enter it. Aspirations for their children tend to be realistic in terms of the childrens' abilities. How realistic they are for low income families living as these do is another, more debatable matter. If the children are to have a fighting chance to continue their education and acquire the means to higher earning power, they will need more than parental confidence in them and encouragement by the school. Among other things more facilities for remediation are needed in the schools and parents need the means to divest their children of the stigma of low income status. They could do this readily with an adequate income. A children's allowance would be a major step in that direction.

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III. JOBS AND THE FUTURE

A picture of the economically marginal situation of the families emerges from data about their employment and income. Seven out of ten heads of households were in blue collar occupations. Many such jobs ordinarily provide an adequate living so one may wonder why this did not hold true for the workers in the sample. It was not due to part-time employment, because those who had jobs worked at them full-time. Neither were they exceptionally mobile; 84% had had their current job for at least seven or eight months.

Low incomes were not due to the household heads being women, as is the case with many urban ghetto families. Only six were headed by employed women. The major income producers for two-thirds of the families were employed men. The other family heads were retired, unemployed or women. It is evident that the reasons for low incomes were not the obvious ones sometimes given by critics of the poor, such as unwillingness to work or laziness. The reasons must be sought elsewhere.

Paradoxically, many well paying jobs went begging in the Madison area while these people held marginal jobs. These jobs were not open to the people in the sample, partly because only 36% of the workers had received any special job training and the majority were qualified only for unskilled or semi-skilled jobs. Of those who had training, one-fifth received it on-the-job, another fifth had private or public vocational school training, and two-fifths from a combination of sources such as military training, correspondence school, etc. Half of the family heads would be interested in vocational training. The most frequent reasons for lack of interest in training were the feelings that they already had enough or that they were too old to attempt to upgrade their skills.

Analysis of the way in which people obtained jobs revealed that two made use of the state employment service to get their current job, one used a private employment agency and four got their jobs through a union. The rest obtained jobs through friends and relatives (20%), just heard about them (20%), or found a job through newspaper ads (18%). Some of the job problems of the workers may be due to their inefficient methods of job finding and lack of adequate vocational counselling.

In twenty five families more than one family member worked. In twelve families it was a spouse; six had children working, and in seven both the spouse and children worked. The marginal character of these families persists in spite of more than one working member in the family. Like the family head, 60% of the employed family members were in blue collar occupations. Only three employed wives had vocational training and most working wives had part-time jobs. Employed wives did not contribute much to the family in terms of dollars but their contribution to the budget of a marginal family was both significant and necessary.

Although eighteen family heads did not work, the stereotype of the unemployed poor as lazy, or lacking in the initiative to seek work, did not hold up. Half of those not working had to remain in the home to care for children or because of a physical or emotional disability. The heads of these families obviously were not in the labor market for reasons beyond their control. The other nine heads of families were in the labor market although not working. Thus the unemployment rate in the sample was a high 22%. The only ones who might be immediate candidates for jobs, however, were five family heads who were victims of temporary or seasonal lay-offs, and they tended to have very limited job skills.

All but one family without earned income because of unemployment relied at least partially on social welfare programs for help. Four out of ten received public assistance benefits and 30% depended on unemployment compensation or disability compensation. Social security was the major means of support for four families with retired heads. One family depended on veteran's benefits and two others had a combination of spouse's earning and public assistance. Only one family relied on relatives and savings and none had help from friends and relatives or private social agencies. Apparently the extended family no longer serves as a resource for these people.

Only one family mentioned general relief as an income resource. From contacts with local relief directors, the lack of reliance upon local relief is understandable. General relief in rural areas is often an inadequate, demeaning kind of help. Many local relief directors actively discourage people from seeking help. They seem more dedicated to saving money than meeting human needs.

When families were asked if their income met all the family needs, 64% said that it did not. Home improvement, recreation, medical care and food were areas in which families had unmet needs. To supplement incomes, two-thirds of the families had done some gardening. Only 18% were able to obtain more than half of their food in this manner.

Most families saw their financial situation deteriorating. Six out of ten claimed that they now were having a harder time making ends meet than two years ago. Another fifth felt things were about the same and the rest said things were slightly better. Most people gave inflation as the reason for increased difficulty.

Because people tend to evaluate their condition in terms of the people around them, they were asked how their neighbors got along financially compared to most people. Nearly three-fourths felt their neighbors were as well of, 14% said that they were worse off and 14% thought they were better off. However, only 52% of the interviewees felt their own family was as well off as their neighbors, 42% said they were not as well off, and 6% considered themselves better off.

Among the twenty families currently receiving financial assistance, eleven saw their financial condition as worse than their neighbors and nine did not. More public aid recipients (55%) than non-recipients (33.2%) said their financial condition was worse than their neighbors. This suggests that being on public assistance influenced the individual's perception of his status.

Self perception is believed to influence one's attitude toward the future. The low income person may look to the future.more pessimistically than others and see little chance of change. Consequently he may resign himself rather than look for ways to change his condition. Some data on the respondents' perceptions of the present and future help to test these ideas.

When asked to estimate whether their financial situation now was better, the same, or worse than that of other people, 42% said it was worse, and 58% considered it the same or better. In the former group, 38% were pessimistic about their financial future and 62% thought that next year would be the same or better for them. Among those who felt they now got along as well as others, only 10% anticipated that their future would be worse off, 90% thought that things would be as well off, or better than they were now.

Only one in four of the interviewees thought that they would be better off financially in the future. Dark pessimism is evident in the attitude of the 20% who saw their future as worse than their present, but the attitude of the majority, who saw their future unchanged, should not be interpreted as optimism. Most see the present as unenviable and an unchanged future is a bleak prospect for them.

These attitudes were found in a group of low income people who in many ways are typical Americans. They want good educations for their children, they work hard, are interested in better jobs and, apart from their economic marginality, do not seem to be problems in their communities. Their problems are not attributable to withdrawal from society, or any evident negative values. As Chaiklin points out, "...the poor are aware of the goals and standards of our society but they do not expect to attain them." (1) They have tested reality and found it wanting.

How appropriate emphasis upon retraining (or training since so many had none to start with) would be for a group of rural men in their 40's, is debatable. It rests upon assumptions about their motivation, mobility and the nature of the job market that may be untenable. The workers did not create their situation and a societal response to that ineluctable fact must take this into account in planning for and with them.

In the opinion of most of the people interviewed their future is not bright. Six out of ten thought they were having a harder time making ends meet than they did two years ago and most saw no prospect of improving their economic position. They feel themselves locked into poverty.

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IV. THE USE OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Urban or rural, the family has become inreasingly dependent upon other institutions to meet its needs. Among the network of "secondary" institutions fulfilling functions once performed by primary groups such as the family, friends and neighbors, are the social service agencies which work to strengthen family life and to enable families to meet crises. (10)

An effort was made to discover how many people knew about and used various kinds of social services and what they thought about them. Information was sought about: (a) the resources rural people turn to for help with interpersonal problems such as marital difficulties and child guidance; (b) where they go for financial aid and for help in finding jobs; (c) their knowledge of resources available for special problems, such as for the handicapped, the elderly, disabled and the sick who need housekeeping help and nursing care; (d) knowledge of resources to help alcoholics; (e) whether the respondents are "problem families"; (f) how factors such as age, education, and self-perception influence attitudes, knowledge and use of agencies.

People were asked for their opinions about the availability of helping agencies and facilities, both in Madison and in their own areas. Other questions asked whether they felt capable of working for change in the provision of some services, and, if not, to indicate officials or individuals who could do so. Additional questions tried to elicit opinions about community needs as well as the respondent's participation in community affairs.

In addition to interviews with respondents, two other data sources were utilized; the local Social Service Exchange and the County Department of Social Services. The exchange keeps a record of all social agency contacts registered by its members. The Department of Social Services keeps a current record of financial aid given to public assistance recipients.

As noted earlier, few rural studies have touched on the availability and use of social services in rural areas. (8) Most of the available studies are health related but probably have relevance for the delivery of social services. (3) Of course, research on utilization of social services in the city is not much better. The few studies that have been made point up how loath the welfare system has been to get a client's eye view of the social services. (4)

There are hazards in generalizing from the urban to the rural situation, apart from the limited nature of the available information. Long ago in discussing rural social services, Josephine Brown suggested that rural residents tend to be suspicious and individualistic. (2) If this is more than folklore, then it certainly could affect their attitudes toward the social services. More recently, Larson and Rogers alluded to a rural lack of "open-mindness." (5) This and a reluctance to accept new ideas described by Schultz also could affect reactions to the welfare system. (7) In addition, there is the bald fact that the range of social services available in the city, are seldom found in rural areas. Such things severely restrict any comparisons of urban and rural attitudes because of the widely differing meaning that questions about services would have to urban and rural residents.

Community Resources

Dane County has 176 public and private social service agencies, 108 of which provide services to people on a county-wide basis. (9) The rest are limited to urban residents, or to servicing other agencies. All are located in or near Madison. Access to them, even from the outermost point in Dane County, would be a matter of traveling a maximum of fifteen or twenty miles. In 1967 a mailed questionaire to 100 low income families by the county Community Action Commission, disclosed that transportation was a severe problem for most of them and helps to explain their limited access to agency services.

There are twenty four social agencies providing direct services in Dane County: (a) six provide family counseling; (b) twelve provide services for the handicapped; (c) one agency provides nursing services; (d) three provide serivces for alcoholics; (e) four provide employment services; (f) then provide financial assistance, although one one (Dane County Department of Social Services) provides long term assistance; (g) one provides limited housekeeping help for disabled or elderly people in rural areas. No day care centers were available to rural residents.

The study focused on agencies serving rural residents with counseling and services dealing with interpersonal problems (particularly child guidance and marital problems); health problems (particularly those concerning physical handicaps, nursing care and alsoholism); family service problems (especially need for babysitting and housekeeping for elderly and disabled persons); financial problems; and employment problems.

Use of Social Services

Only twenty six of the fifty families said they had used social service agencies. After checking with the Social Service Exchange and with the public assistance agency, we discovered that all fifty families were known to agencies, and that thirty nine were active clients of at least one agency at the time of the study.

There were twenty six of the thirty nine families receiving service from only one agency, and thirteen receiving service from two or three agencies concurrently. No family was active with more than three agencies.

Families were classified as "multi-problem" if active with two or more agencies providing different types of service, (e.g., financial assistance from the Department of Social Services and health care provided by the County Nurses). "Single problem" families were receiving only one kind of help from one agency. According to these criteria, twenty six (52%) of the families in the study were single problem families and thirteen families (26%) were multi-problem families. The remaining eleven families were not currently active with any agency.

Considering the fact that at times all of the families used social service agencies, (records go back as far as 1938), the frequency of case openings during the last twenty years was examined. Many families had been active more than once with an agency. Thus there was a total of 255 case openings over the twenty year period. Ten families had used only a single agency, while the other forty families had used two or more. The average family had used four agencies. One family had used nine agencies and another eleven.

Who Provided Services

Without the Dane County Department of Social Services,* the Dane County Health Department, and the Dane County Welfare Department, the fifty families would be without basic social services such as financial assistance, health and nursing care, and family and individual counselling. Social Service Exchange records showed that the Dane County Department of Social Services had helped thirty-three families through sixty-two case openings. The Dane County Public Health Department** had helped thirty six families in seventy seven openings and Dane County Welfare Department helped twenty one families in thirty two case openings.*** The three agencies had 171 openings with the fifty families, and they accounted for more than 67% of all service contacts during the past twenty years.

Although other agencies provided services to these people, they had done so primarily when families happened to be urban residents. Few agencies, other than the three mentioned, extend their services beyond the limits of Madison and/or other nearby incorporated areas. That voluntary agencies provide few services in rural areas is attributable in part to their limited budgets. It should not be forgotten, however, that professional social work has long tended to disengage from the poor, whether urban or rural. (6) This plays a role in the service pattern that has developed in cities as well as in rural areas. Along with the search for new modalities to serve the poor there must be recognition that the delivery of service to those who need it is primarily a public responsibility.

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*the Dane County Department of Social Services (formerly Dane County Department of Public Assistance) administers categorical aid programs such as Old Age Assistance and Aid to Families with Dependent Children.

**The Dane County Public Health Department provides public health nursing and other services county-wide.

***The Dane County Welfare Department investigates admissions to certain county institutions, assists municipalities with relief problems, etc.

People were asked what resources they would use if they needed help with: marital problems, child guidance, nursing care, physical handicap, alcoholism, child care, housekeeping, employment or financial aid. Some attitudes towards social services were revealed by their first choices for help with problems. Many people mentioned several alternatives while others could not mention any type of outside help for solving problems.

Answers tended to fall into four categories: (a) choices of professional help, doctors, social workers, lawyers, and teachers, plus employment agencies, and commercial loan establishments such as banks, finance companies, etc. When a bank or loan establishment was mentioned these always were placed under "professional help" by the respondents, so they were left in the professional help category. (b) Clergymen can be considered professional helpers but they were mentioned so frequently that they were put in a separate category. (c) Intra-family solutions as first choices for problem solving included parents, children, other relatives, or relying on one's self to solve problems. (d) Consulting a friend, as a choice for help included all first choices where the advice of friends would be sought. (e) A fifth category took care of cases in which no answer was given, or where the respondent did not know how to answer.

Considerable reliance was placed on "professional" help for solving seven of the nine problems and this accounted for 56% of 450 responses. It is difficult to give a precise breakdown of the professional help choices but physicians were the preferred professional help for 136 (54%) of those who referred to health problems. Physicians also were a high ranking choice for child guidance problems and were mentioned several times for marital problems and for help with alcoholism.

Although social workers would be chosen for certain problems, they were low in the overall total of professional help choices. Doctors often would be mentioned as first choice followed by "or a social worker". Although this did not constitute a first choice, it did indicate that social workers might be considered a source of help.

If confronted by financial problems, twenty three people (46%) said they would go to a bank, finance company, or loan company for help. Although it may be argued that these should not be included as "professional help" agencies, the respondents saw them as such.

Most people said they would go to an employment agency to find employment, but they actually relied on word-of-mouth to find jobs. For housekeeping help in a crisis they would rely on "professional" resources. One agency provides such help but only one respondent mentioned it as a resource. Eleven people saw an employment agency as a resource for such help and four would ask the county nurses for help. It was not possible to discover what other agencies the respondents would turn to for housekeeping and child care services. One women commented, "Gosh, I've never thought about what I'd do if I had to get housekeeping help. There just isn't any place to go for that kind of service around here."

To deal with alcoholism, fifteen people would turn to Alcoholics Anonymous as a source of professional help. Only two respondents mentioned social workers as a resource and three would choose physicians. The rest gave vague responses.

The clergy ranked last in comparison with other resources, except in regard to marital problems. There, 52% of the people would turn to the clergy for help. This agrees with what Bailey found in New York where the clergyman was also the preferred source of help for marital problems. (1)

Intrafamily solutions ranked second in preferred ways to handle problems, and ranked highest for child guidance, child care, housekeeping help and financial problems. In no area did it rank first, giving support to the notion that the rural family is relying on secondary relationships (such as formal organizations and social agencies) rather than on kinship systems for help.

Friends ranked third as a resource, being mentioned most for child care and housekeeping help. People also used friends for help in finding jobs.

Knowledge of Resources

Interviewees were asked if they knew social agencies that provided help for specific problems. If they said yes, they were asked to identify the agencies. Results appear in Table 2.

Table 2: Knowledge of Agencies

Problem	Knew an Agency	Did not know an Agency	No Answer	Total
Marital Problem	26	22	2	50
Child Guidance	20	29	1	50
Physical Handicap	28	18	4	50
Nursing Care	32	18	-	50
Alcoholism	34	15	1	50
Child Care	6	43	1	50
Housekeeping	13	34	3	50
Financial Problem	36	14	-	50
Employment Problem	34	16	-	50

A slight majority of the respondents knew about resources for most problems. This was not true of child care, housekeeping, or child guidance problems. The answers about child care or housekeeping are not surprising because only one agency provides help for such problems. Six out of ten people did not know about resources for help with children's problems although six agencies are available to them for this purpose. The greatest number of specific resources were reported in connection with financial problems. Sixty percent of the people would turn to a bank or loan company for help with such problems.

Table 3 shows that most people denied ever having used agencies for help. The area in which agencies were used most frequently was employment with eighteen users. Many fewer admitted using services for financial aid or for alcoholic problems.

Table 3: Reported Use of Agencies

Problem	Used	Did Not	No Ans	Total
Marital	5	44	1	50
Child Guidance	6	43	1	50
Physical Handicap	6	43	1	50
Nursing Care	5	44	1	50
Alcoholism	8	42	-	50
Child Care	-	50	-	50
Housekeeping	-	50	-	50
Financial	9	41	-	50
Employment	18	32	-	50

Use of Resources

The actual use of resources for financial aid was checked through the records of the social service exchange. Although 41 of the respondents said they had not used agencies for financial help, fifteen were receiving it at the time they were interviewed and fourteen had received it at some time in the past. The fact that so many denied this relationship with public assistance reveals a pervasive feeling that there is something amiss with admitting such help.

Factors Influencing Knowledge of and Use of Services

Three problem areas, marital problems, child guidance problems and financial problems, were chosen for analysis in terms of the respondents age, education, use of services and economic self-perception. The sample was divided into three age groups; those under 35 (n=21); between 35 and 45 (n=17); and those over 45 (n=12).

Self-perception of economic status was judged by answers to the question, "Do you see yourself as better off, the same or worse off financially than your neighbors?" There were 21 (42%) who saw themselves as poorer than their neighbors. Those who answered "as well off or better off were considered "not in poverty". Only three respondents saw themselves as better off than their neighbors and the other 26 were "as well off" as their neighbors.

Professional help was the most frequent first choice for help with child guidance problems, regardless of the person's education. It also was the highest ranking first choice of all age groups, although more persons over 45 would look for such help than younger people would. (66% vs 47%)

For help with marital problems 54% of the people would turn to a clergyman, regardless of their age, education, or their self-perception. One in five would look to professional help, and this meant consulting a physician, while the same number would look to their family for help. Only 4% would turn to friends.

Six out of ten people with financial problems would go to a bank or loan company, regardless of age, education, or self-perception. About 30% would turn to a social agency.

The individual's self-perception had some influence on preferred resources for help with children's problems. Most people would choose professional help with more of the poor seeking such help than the non-poor. The non-poor tended to rely upon family and clergy somewhat more than those who saw themselves as poor.

Half of those under 35 would seek intra-family solutions to financial problems. Other than this, intra-family solutions were evenly distributed regardless of education or self-perception. Eighty percent of those who mentioned a bank or loan company did not see themselves as poor. On the other hand, 80% of those who mentioned a social work agency saw themselves as poor.

One's self-perception also made a considerable difference in whether the respondent knew of a social agency dealing with the three problems. More than half (54%) of the non-poor knew of resources, compared to 39% of those who saw themselves as poor. Twice as many people under 45 knew of resources than did those over 45.

Education had some effect on knowledge about financial resources although those with more education were more likely to know of marital and child guidance resources. For example, 53% of those with 12 or more years of education knew of resources compared to 30% of those who went from the 9th to 11th grades and only 18% of those who went to school for eight years or less.

Only 18% of the respondents admitted that they had used marital counseling and child guidance resources. Age made little difference in acknowledged use, but those with more education tended to use resources more than those with less education. Persons who considered themselves poor acknowledged use of these resources more than those who did not.

When social service exchange records were examined it was found that half of those who acknowledged using social agencies were currently active with some agency and the rest had been active. Among those who denied having used social agencies, 36% were currently active, 34% had once used agency services, and there was no record of the rest having received services. The respondents' age or education seemed to have little affect upon the pattern of acknowledgement or denial of receipt of services.

Among those who had received services at some time (n=38), nine acknowledged that they had and 29 denied it. Of those who saw themselves as poor, 37% acknowledged using social agencies compared to 10.5% of those who did not see themselves as poor.

Summary

Low income families made considerable use of public social services in Dane County. Two-thirds of all of the agency contacts reported during the past twenty years were with the three public agencies, although more than 100 agencies offer county-wide services. In practice few operate outside of the Madison area. Many people were reluctant to admit that they used agency services, but eight out of ten families were known to at least one social agency at the time they were interviewed.

When confronted with typical problem situations and asked where they could seek help, people tended to prefer persons other than social workers as helpers. The clergy were seen as helpful with marital problems and physicians for child guidance and several other problems. Help would be sought from the extended family for some problems, but usually it was not a first choice. This reflects its diminished role as a resource in contemporary society.

Although at some time all of the families had contact with some social agency, many people professed ignorance of resources to help with specific problems. The agencies they used did not cover all problem areas mentioned to them, so it is possible that many were unaware of existing social services in the county. This reveals a gap in communication between agencies and those they exist to serve.

Age and education played a small role in the preferences for sources of help with problems. In some cases one's self-perception as poor or non-poor had an influence upon preferences.

Whatever their reason, most people would not acknowledge that they had received help from social agencies. One can speculate about the reasons for their refusal, but perhaps a clue can be found in the fact that those who saw themselves as poor were more inclined to admit receiving help, while those who denied being poor denied they sought help.

Contemporary social work is beginning to stress the importance of structural changes in society in order to maximize opportunities for the poor. It must not be forgotten, however, that the private problems of the poor also need sustained attention. The wide range of problems found in the sample reveals that low income families are plagued by more than a lack of money. If they had money, many undoubtedly could get help for their problems on their own, and some problems stemming from lack of money would disappear. For the foreseeable future, however, they will continue to be handicapped by low incomes and the only agencies that can furnish needed services are in the public sector. Although successive ammendments to the Social Security Act have emphasized the service component in the function of public agencies, much more must be done if low income people are to avoid the long term consequences of being locked into poverty.

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V. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Voluntary associations are usually assumed to play an important role in American life. Many undoubtedly do, but Wright and Hyman point out that "Voluntary association membership is not characteristic of the majority of Americans." (4) This does not necessarily detract from the importance of associations; it merely indicated that they may have a limited and special clientele. Because the involvement of low income people in the war on poverty and other community activities is predicated upon their participation in various kinds of voluntary associations, we were interested in any pattern of associational life that could be built upon.

Studies of the social participation patterns of rural residents suggest that participation in associations is influenced by a number of factors. High participation tended to occur when the individual lived in a definable "neighborhood", belonged to a church, lived near a trading center, owned a car and telephone, read books and magazines, had a "reasonable" gross income, and spent time watching TV or listening to the radio. Alone, no factors were found statistically significant. The individual's self-perception also was probably involved. In the past several factors were found not to have any significant effect on participation. These were occupation in a non-farm setting, the age of the head of the family, the nationality of the head, and the size of the place in which the head was employed. (2)

To determine the general participation level in associations, people in the sample were asked the number of organizations to which they and others in the family belonged and who in the family held the membership.

Formal organizations were divided into five major types: (a) civic groups (political parties, tax payer's associations, and the like); (b) recreational groups, (hobby clubs, scouts, 4-H clubs); (c) educational groups (such as adult education classes, discussion clubs, PTA associations); (d) church groups; (e) economic and business groups (labor unions, cooperatives, chambers of commerce, farmer's organizations).

The boundaries of these categories are not always clear cut. A 4-H group has an educational function when holding classes on home nursing, or poultry raising. Labor unions often lobby for legislation, church groups sponsor athletic teams, or undertake community betterment projects, and so forth.

Certain organizations such as political parties and other civic organizations were less in evidence, perhaps due to the small population of some political units, and easy communication between the local official and his constituency. Several respondents said that every year or so some local official would convene a general "town meeting" to inform the population of the recent activities of its government. On the other hand churches sponsor many activities which might operate independently in urban settings. These were some reasons why it appeared more appropriate to assess participation levels on the basis of the number, rather than types of organizations belonged to.

Levels of Social Participation

A family whose members were involved in five or more organizations was considered high in participation. Two to four memberships per family was considered moderate, and one membership in a family was viewed as low participation. None was "no participation."

Table 4: Level of Participation of Families

Participation		
High	8	(16.0)
Moderate	6	(12.0)
Low	29	(58.0)
None	7	(14.0)
TOTAL	50	(100.0)

Those in the sample were much more likely to belong to associations than people in the Wright and Hyman study of data gathered in 1953. (4) In the national rural non-farm group, 40% belonged to no association; in the sample only 14% did not belong. Nationally 37% belonged to one association; in the sample 58% did. In the national study 23% belonged to two or more organizations compared to 28% of those in the present study. Another study of rural low income people found that 75% of them belonged to at least one organization. (3) The divergence of findings of the two rural studies from the national data cited by Wright and Hyman shows how important it is to acquire more information about rural behavior in different places.

The fact that 14% of the sample reported no participation was interesting because a study by Kolb based on a sample of rural Wisconsinites reported that 30% did not participate in any organizations. (1)

Perhaps even more indicative of the degree of participation, beyond mere membership in an organization, is the amount of time and effort the individual invests in membership. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they attended their organizational meetings regularly, seldom, or never. These people not only tended to join more often than those in other studies, they also attend with a high degree of regularity. Six out of ten memberships were characterized by regular attendance, 34% seldom attended, but only 4% never attended.

We were interested in determining how the family's perception of its economic status affected participation. Some tendency toward greater participation appeared among families that viewed their financial status as the same as or better than their neighbors. In this group, 38% had at least a moderate participation level compared to 14.2% of those who saw themselves worse off than their neighbors.

A study by Kolb showed that the urban or rural location of the place of employment of the head of the family had no effect on the family's participation level. (2) It was found that 40% of those working in urban areas participated, compared to 41% of those working in rural settings.

In families whose heads were over 40 years of age, 36.4% had at least a moderate participation level compared to 20% in the younger group. It should be recalled that only families with children were interviewed and participation levels were calculated by adding all the memberships held in each family, regardless of whether these memberships were held by adults or younger family members. Under these conditions the younger family is disadvantaged in two ways. First, the care and supervision of young children is time consuming, leaving fewer opportunities for parents to join in organizations which take them out of the home. Secondly, fewer organizations are open to the younger child, cutting down on the possible total family memberships. Parents of older children are freer to look outside the home for associations. The presence of teen-agers in these families tends to boost total family memberships because this age group is often involved in school activities, youth organizations and the like. The wider range of contacts among older persons might be used to advantage by anyone interested in community development.

Membership in organized groups does not tell a complete story of sociability. One must take into account whether or not groups appeal to diverse individual interests. Health, occupational demands such as long commuting distances, or the erratic seasonal time demands on the person who is actively farming, could affect individual interest in organizations.

Time often is spent in informal visiting with friends outside the kinship group. The respondent was asked the number of people he considered to be his "best friends" i.e., "someone with whom you can talk over personal problems". It was hoped that this would get at the number of people the respondent felt comfortable with socially, as opposed to acquaintances.

The number of close friendships was divided into three categories. Six or more close friendships were viewed as an indication of "high sociability". One to five friendships were classed as "moderate sociability" and none were considered an indication of "no sociability".

Table 5: Perception of Economic Status and Sociability

Sociability	Same or Better	Worse
High	13 (45.0%)	4 (19.5%)
Moderate	11 (38.0%)	14 (66.5%)
None	5 (17.0%)	3 (14.0%)
TOTAL	29 (100.0%)	21 (100.0%)

When the number of close friendships was compared to the respondent's economic self-perception, a tendency toward more sociability appeared in families that viewed themselves as the same or better off financially. This group also tended toward high participation. Those with a "better" or "same" self-perception had 45% of their number high in sociability, compared to 19.5% of those who thought themselves worse off than others. The latter group was concentrated in the "moderate" sociability category.

Perception of Community Problems

Whether people are likely to join an activity intended to improve community life depends upon many factors. This included their past pattern of participation in groups and whether they saw a need for change and the role the new activity could play in inducing it. Several questions were asked to discover what problems people saw in the community.

One question gave an opportunity to say what if anything in the area needed improvement. More than half of the respondents wanted some new services or facility. Several mentioned two or more specific improvements, so the total number of improvements mentioned was thirty-three. The one mentioned most often was recreation which accounted for 76% of the comments.

We wondered if there would be any relationship between the person's perception of social problems and desire to see improvements in the community. A slight tendency was found for those who acknowledged that problems existed to mention a need for improvements. Of those who saw problems, 64% cited a need for improvements compared to 53% of those who did not see problems.

Willingness to Participate in Programs

Finally, people were asked if they felt there was anything they could do to initiate action to bring about improvements. If an individual felt there was something he could do, he was asked what he could do. If he felt he could do nothing, he was asked whose responsibility it was to get things done.

Seven people felt they could do something to start improvements. Two indicated that they could begin by taking an idea to some already formed group, (one named his American Legion Post) and attempt to interest it in sponsoring the project. Four others said that they would be willing to form and lead new groups organized to accomplish a specific task. One said he could make a personal appeal to local town officials to interest them in taking action.

Two other people said that although they did not want the responsibility of initiating action, they would be willing to assist anyone who wanted to attempt some kind of community improvement. One said that he would do whatever he was asked, and the other felt she could begin to improve the community by cleaning up the yard around her house.

Most people (n=43) felt there was nothing they could do to initiate interest in or action toward securing new services for their area. When asked whose job it was to initiate action, the most frequent response was to pinpoint some part of the local social structure as the logical place to begin. Since these people are without political leverage such an answer is eminently practical. Nobody thought action should start at the state or federal level. Only two people thought that a body as far removed as county government shoud assume initial responsibility. Two said local church and school groups should carry the ball. Four others indicated it was the prerogative of "local citizens" but did not elaborate on who these citizens were. According to 27 people the responsibility for action for local improvements rested with town officials. The tradition of local responsibility is ingrained.

Summary

We hoped to obtain information about the potential for enlisting economically deprived rural people in program planning around the problems of poverty. The answers we got provide some clues about how the perception of low income status influences attitudes and feelings about local conditions. People told about their involvement in organizations, and their feelings about responsibility for initiating community activities. People were involved in many areas of community life and they are not so isolated that they could not be reached through the churches, at organization meetings and in other ways.

People felt that local government was responsible for initiating change. Their reliance upon local leaders for direction is predictable, but could be frustrating to community development efforts to involve them in change.

Another possible barrier to involvement is the fact that more than half of the sample felt that they were as well off financially as the rest of the community. This perception hardly squares with reality, but it means that their attitudes and behaviors will not lead them to spontaneous identification with the poor. Even those who were receiving public assistance split almost in half on their perception of economic status with 45% seeing no difference between their financial condition and that of their neighbor.

The general level of participation in clubs and number of friendships supports the impression that the sample did not perceive low income as isolating them from the rest of the community. People also tended to deny that there were serious community problems or the need for facilities other than recreational. Those who saw social problems considered them the result of some general deterioration of society.

More investigation is needed to determine the components of such self-perceptions and why people are satisfied with present conditions. Knowing more about such things would help community workers assess the needs and the potential for change in rural areas.

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VI. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The rural poor in Dane County live in what Galbraith called "case" poverty, i.e., individualized poverty in contrast to the "insular" poverty that characterizes Appalachia or an Indian reservation. (1) This study of fifty white low income families with school age children found that poverty was a way of life for them; they were not temporarily poor.

While sharing low incomes and some other undesirable things, they actually were a diverse group of people. They suffer many of the disabilities of the urban poor, but differ from them in important ways. Unlike the low income minority family in the large city, for example, fatherless families were not the rule in this rural sample. Only four mothers were divorced and one was separated. The children were not concentrated in certain schools. The dispersal of rural low income families tends to offset the reinforcement of low income behaviors and community segregation and discrimination against the readily identifiable poor found in ghettoes. These and other positives do not, of course, mean that the low income family has an idyllic existence in rural Dane County.* They do, however, point up the fact that one cannot speak of the poor with assurance.

Our low income families were long term area residents, 27 having lived in the county all their lives. Only 13 had been county residents for less than ten years. In large part the lives of those in the sample had been shaped by local experiences.

The average family had five children and was headed by a father in his early 40's, a fact with implications for job training and mobility. Although all families were "rural", only 19 lived on farms. The rest lived in hamlets or other non-farm places. Three families lived in trailers, 5 in apartments and 42 in single family houses. Almost half of the families (n=24) owned their homes. This is another way in which the rural low income family often differs from its urban counterpart. Unfortunately, however, home ownership is no guarantee that a person is not poor.

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*The fact that it was possible to identify low income families through the use of informants suggests that many if not most of them may be identifiable by their neighbors, too. Although what this means to the family's self image is not explored one can speculate how the stigma of poverty status affects the attitudes and behaviors of families in the study.

Most families not only were not farm families, they had few ties to farming. Only 16% of the household heads were farmers or farm laborers. Families often lived in the country because rentals are lower and to avoid the high cost of living in a place like Madison. Although families lived in the country, their ties to the city are revealed by the fact that 25 of the 37 family heads who were employed or employable did work or had worked in urban places within the county. The urban employment added substantially to family budgets because of the cost of travel. The other twelve employed heads of families worked in rural areas, eight in jobs related to farming.

The typical family head had 9.8 years of education. This put him at a competitive disadvantage with the average rural person over 25 in the county who had a median education of twelve years. Younger family heads had more education than older ones in the sample, and the children of both were staying in school. The drop out rate of their high school children was no higher than that of other high school students in the county. The children were not problems in school and school staff was interested in helping them with their education. The children were enrolled in excellent schools and we found no evidence that they suffered any discrimination because of low income status, which in most cases was known to school staff.

Parents were interested in their childrens' education and encouraged them to remain in school. The parental attitude, and the overall performance of the children, suggests that not all the children will be burdened with the educational handicap of their parents. Parents feel locked into poverty but they seem determined to move their children out of poverty. Along with this hopeful prospect, however, there is the unfortunate fact that the retardation rate among the children was several times higher than it was among all the school children in the county.

Families were not socially isolated, although most people did not report having many friends. There were 43 families with some organizational affiliation. Those who did not see themselves as poor tended to be more active socially and had more friends than those who thought of themselves as poor. The effect of one's self-image upon behavior is evident. Families had access to mass communication media and were not ill informed.

People in the sample were not poor because they avoid work. Although the unemployment rate in the sample was about 22%, only five immediately employable family heads were unemployed at the time of the study. None had completed high school and they had an average age of 52.8 years. Limited educations and age made job finding especially difficult for them. Thirteen other family heads were not in the labor market due to retirement, poor health, or the need to care for small children. All of those not working were receiving some kind of welfare aid. Two-thirds of all the families did gardening to supplement their budgets, but only nine were able to provide more than one-half of their food needs in this manner.

The economic marginality of the families becomes more evident when one considers that many are poor despite the fact that several family members work. Marginal incomes were not due to part-time employment, the sex of the worker or to frequent job changes. Much more relevant were limited educations and inadequate skills which held household heads in low paying blue collar occupations. Half were not interested in vocational training, usually due to age, poor health, or having small children to care for. Another possible reason was the fact that such training could be inconvenient given the probable location of training projects.

People rarely used the state employment service to find jobs but relied instead upon informal channels for information about jobs. This excluded them from the counseling incidental to using the employment agency as well as from the wider range of jobs ordinarily available through an agency. Since these people are not going to the employment service, ways have to be found to bring this extremely valuable service to them. Efforts to upgrade the employment of some people in the sample would have much to build on, given their interest in jobs, job stability, etc. It should be noted, however, that "vocational rehabilitation" would be no panacea for these people or for thousands like them in the country.

The attractive notion that job training will turn the poor into productive workers who pay taxes instead of consume them is based upon assumptions about the poor that accord little with reality.

The church continues to be important to many of these people. A Protestant religious preference was expressed by 28 people and 22 identified themselves as Catholics. All but seven families belonged to churches and the majority attended church weekly. Most did not belong to religious organizations, although Catholics tended to be more active in church affairs than Protestants. Those interested in working with the rural poor should be aware that clergymen were by far the best sources of information tapped during this study. Since a majority of the people felt that the church should play a more active role in the community, more attention could be given to utilizing the churches as resources in developing economic opportunity programs.

Public social agencies carried most of the responsibility for providing services to families in the sample. Although twenty families now were receiving some form of public assistance, all families had received such help at some time in the past. The universal exposure to the public social services was not acknowledged by 80% of the families. Those with more education or who saw themselves as better off than their neighbors were more likely to deny having received help. This denial could create an erroneous impression about the extent to which some social services are available to rural dwellers. There are 24 agencies in the county that can provide direct services to rural residents, but approximately two-thirds of the services came from three county agencies: The County Department of Social Services, the County Health Department and the County Welfare Department. The extensive use of the public agencies reveals their paramount role in meeting the social service needs of those in rural areas.

Families knew about social agencies but stressed the use of other problem solving resources. The church was considered the primary resource for marital counseling, for example. Friends and relatives were the major, if not the only resource for child care and housekeeping services, especially for the sick and the aged. In spite of their low incomes, most people said they would turn to a bank or a loan company if they had financial problems. In a way this is an eminently reasonable response, although their chosen resource would probably prove to be illusory. We do not know whether they would turn to financial institutions in spite of, or because of their experiences with public assistance, but it is interesting to note that the first thought of an economically marginal group was to turn for help to conventional resources and not to a welfare agency.

Many families had long experience with financial dependency and some were "multi-problem" families. If their economic problems were solved tomorrow through some form of guaranteed income, their need for social services would continue. Indeed the role of the public agency easily could expand significantly if it had the means to cope effectively with the nonfinancial needs of these families. Although ammendments to the Social Security Act in recent years are intended to foster this, they are a long way from their stated goal. The public agency, however, remains the only institution with the potential for meeting the needs of low income families in rural Dane County. One effective barrier to accomplishing its goal is its often negative image among those it was created to serve.

Inadequacies of welfare budgets, archaic regulations and reams of paperwork that confuse clients and workers alike, and the negative feelings that accompany financial dependency help explain why people resent social agencies and their workers. Added to this in rural areas is the often punitive approach to the poor found in the administration of township relief. The average person does not distinguish this non-professional "social service" from other aspects of social work. As a result, a form of Gresham's law seems operative, with bad "social work" driving people away from the good. Most people knew about social agencies, but were not likely to use more than a few of them, and then, primarily for financial need. If they are to get the services they need, aggressive outreach must characterize efforts to link them to resources and social work must become more palatable to them, in part by driving inadequate services out of existence.

One purpose of this study was to explore how receptive rural low income people might be to community action or community development projects intended to mobilize them to change their situation. Some of our findings reveal major obstacles to their involvement in such activities.

Local leadership is not change oriented, but people tended to rely on it to initiate change. Not many could see themselves promoting community improvements, the most pressing of which, according to most people, was recreational facilities. The stance of our sample confirms Fuller's comment that the "...inherent difficulty underlying government help to self-help in overcoming rural poverty is a lack of cohesive, articulate clientele." (2) Far from demanding anything from the government, these people are dependent on it. Inducting them into an essentially political role would encounter many problems.

An important consideration in recruiting local people for community action is that they see themselves as appropriately involved in it. Helping them see that they can and should participate is often a long drawn out process. Like gestation, it cannot be hurried no matter how urgently agencies clamor for results. The data we gathered suggests that considerable work and time would be needed in order to gain the involvement of those in the sample.

Those who did not identify themselves as poor had self-perceptions with consequences for their other attitudes and the way they behaved. No matter how realistic their poverty status may seem in terms of objective criteria, their subjective perception of status must be acknowledged by community workers and others planning to work with them.

Lewin pointed out that, "It is a well known fact that the task of organizing a group which is economically or otherwise underprivileged is seriously hampered by those members whose real goal is to leave the group rather than to promote it." (5) The fact that a substantial number of people in the sample do not identify themselves as poor makes it unlikely that they will associate themselves with economic opportunity programs. It happens that the poor who deny their poverty tend to be the better educated who might make important contributions to development programs if they could be brought into them.

Another factor that may limit involvement in economic opportunity programs is the "defeated" attitude of many of the people interviewed. Three-fourths saw no prospect of improving their economic situation. Some were less pessimistic than others but the crucial finding was that so many felt locked into low income status. This has not made them withdraw from life, nor has it grossly affected the behavior of their children. In the long run, however, this attitude can seriously inhibit a family's ability to creatively respond to economic opportunities. Lack of interest in job training may be a symptom of this.

While aware of the negative implications of this attitude, the prospects of introducing change into the lives of the poor and into the social system in which they live should not be considered hopeless. The "resignation" we found does not necessarily denote apathy. Rather it seems a rational assesment of the opportunity system available to them. If they were apathetic they probably would not have confidence that their children could get ahead. In addition, viewing their attitudes as part of a "culture of poverty," would be less than helpful because it implies more resistence to change than might be encountered in community development activities.

The inadequate vocational preparation of most adults may not be due to the fact that they were locally educated. It remains a fact, however, that most people in the sample were products of the local society. This emphasizes local responsibility for remedial action to insure that a new generation does not succumb to the disabilities of their parents.

Widespread denial that they had been public aid recipients reveals how low income people resist admitting having been dependent. The aversion to poverty status could carry over to the "anti-poverty" program. People may avoid involvement with it because of the stigma attached to being poor.* It is too late to change the name of a program christened by people who did not share the stigma of poverty. A more neutral nomenclature might have avoided some of the onus now placed on programs to help the "poor". The term "anti-poverty" may alieniate some who need involvement and who could be helpful in economic opportunity programs. Whatever the merits of terms like the "poor" and "anti-poverty" in other places, in Dane County there are advantages to stressing a more neutral term such as "low-income".

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*In the early days of Headstart in Madison, some mothers would not enroll their children because it had been publicized as a program for the "poor".

There are cogent arguments that the only problem of poor people is their lack of money. At the very least it is usually their most important one. But the deprivation that accompanies lack of money generates problems that money alone cannot solve. Hence the need to do more than put a decent floor under income. The floor must be accompanied by a range of social services responsive to the problems that accompany poverty. Both the floor and remediation are essential unless we are willing to write off additional generations of rural residents.

People had individual and/or family problems plus community related ones. The former afflict people regardless of economic status. Finding a job, marital problems, problems with children and the like can be helped through the intervention of the social worker, the clergyman, psychologist or other helping person. Many social agencies have programs aiding people who come to them with such problems.

Community related problems, on the other hand, have their origins and must find their solutions, outside of the individual or family. An inadequate supply of decent housing because of a political dispute over public housing, or the denial of aid by a local relief official, needs the involvement of the community to find a solution. The organization of low income people can promote community action to solve such problems.

A primary goal of OEO sponsored community action programs is the involvement of low income people in the identification and solution of such problems. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 sought their "maximum feasible participation" in the war on poverty. At least for Congress, an unanticipated consequence of this participation was embarrassment to the established

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political and welfare systems, if not actual threats to them in some places. Interestingly, recent comments of designers of the 1964 act indicate that their intent was to have the poor work in the war on poverty rather than have them involved in policy making. (3)

The probably inevitable reaction to the actual or suspected threat to the established order was the proposal to require local governments to participate in community action programs. This theoretically sound idea has much to recommend it, but it also carries the potential not only for the neutralization of efforts to politicize the poor, but of having community action programs dominated by local government.

There is ample evidence from many places that low income people can contribute to the design and implementation of economic opportunity programs. Whether they can in rural Dane County, given their dispersal and the attitudes reported herein, is an open question. In turn, it raises questions about the most productive approach to the problems of the county's low income residents. Would it be better to focus attention on the problems of individuals and families, met through improved delivery of services, or on the involvement of the poor in community action projects? A national strategy might favor one or another program, even though it was the President's Advisory Commission on Rural Poverty which recognized that, "...the complexity of the problems of rural poverty preclude the success of a single program or approach." (4) Local communities, however, must consider the immediate problems of the poor because they deal not with abstractions but with visible human problems.

Within a context of limited resources and immediate needs, it seems that if one had to opt for community action or augmented social services for families and individuals with funds now available (and with the local culture and power structure unchanged), it probably would be best to stress the latter. Some attention could be given to encouraging people to move into community action but if our assessment of the families and their surroundings is correct, the best investment would be in direct services.

There is nothing dramatic about this and, in terms of the current rhetoric in social work and anti-poverty, it may seem anathema to suggest such a course. For comparable investments, however, individual and social benefits would be much higher, and more sustained, through following the latter course.

Focus upon these problems is a tactical suggestion for a local situation. It does not imply that low income people lack the capacity to do something about community change, only that at present the resources to help them do so are too sketchy to put much faith in them. If substantial funds for such work became available, major impetus could be given to involving low income rural people in community action. This, however, never could become a substitute for other approaches to their problems.

Despite low incomes and other problems, people in the sample have many strengths. Evidence of this appears in their continued reliance upon jobs for income, the low drop out rate among their children, their marital stability and in other ways. One could build solid community involvement on these, given time, money and capable workers. Without this trinity, however, potentially promising programs will be reduced to futile gestures that first tantalize, then frustrate the poor.

Beyond problems responsive to a badly needed expansion of the conventional welfare system and community action, there are the structural problems such as technological unemployment about which the individual or local community can do little or nothing. Here a total societal response is needed and without it, all else eventually becomes a palliative.

Some structural change in the present pattern of income distribution would eliminate many of the problems of the poor. The national policy of providing equality of economic opportunity will not be achieved by trying efforts to motivate people forced to live in dead end communities whether these are urban ghettoes or Indian reservations. Income supplements are what such people need. Whether a supplement would affect their incentive to work is irrelevant because in most cases they have no opportunity to work or else work in marginal jobs of little benefit to the economy.

A step toward meaningful change in the structuring of society to provide economic opportunity would be an income supplement for each of the five children in the families in this study. Regardless of the mechanism used to deliver it, a modest amount of money for each child would help to relieve the pinch of poverty and make it much easier for them and their parents to enjoy normal lives. It would not end the war on poverty. That promises to be a long, costly war, not a blitzkreig. Winning the income battle, however, would be a significant advance, not merely another of the skirmishes that characterize too much of the antipoverty struggle.

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A Methodological Note

It should be noted that it was possible to locate rural low income people through the use of community informants. This approach produced both public assistance recipients and non-recipients, most of whom had once been recipients. While this approach reduced the possibility of bias in the selection of interviewees, it is doubtful that it made much difference in the outcome of the study. Any similar study could use current and closed public assistance lists to select interviewees. The public assistance rolls could be supplemented by lists of those receiving surplus foods or food stamps. If informants are desired in areas similar to Dane County, clergymen probably will be found most useful. Public welfare staff, health workers, teachers and others whose jobs bring them into contact with low income people can also contribute to the identification of low income families.